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Mutter Erde: Ein Versuch über Volksreligion. Von ALBRECHT DIETERICH. Leipzig: Teubner, 1905. Pp. vi+123. M. 3.20.

A generation or more ago the so-called comparative method in the study of mythology and religion was at its height, but the extravagances into which its devotees were led so discredited the procedure that many scholars in the last twenty years have not without reason shown both timidity and hostility toward anything that smacked of the comparative method. Yet the work of the anthropologist and ethnologist cannot be disregarded by the student of religion, who often may be able to interpret fragmentary data of religious custom or ritual among one people by similar, although independent, phenomena found elsewhere. How fruitful such studies can be when properly conducted is shown by this little book by Dieterich, who is widely known for his studies in the religions of Greece and Rome—a book which may well serve as a model of sane investigation in its field. The first two chapters had already appeared in the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* VIII (1905), pp. 1 ff.

Starting with three rites existent among the Romans, according to which they placed the new-born babe on the ground, buried, rather than burned, the bodies of infants, and removed the sick, when in extremis, from his bed and laid him on the earth, Dieterich shows that similar practices are attested, not only for European peoples, but for tribes in the remotest part of the world. He deals therefore with the mysteries of birth, death, and a second birth from the common mother Earth. That the earth was thought of as the source of life by the Athenians is known to every reader of Greek classic literature. After discussing this belief, Dieterich shows that it likewise prevailed in other parts of Greece. He then points out how in later antiquity this original concept of the Earth-mother was brought into relation to Venus, Isis, and the Great Mother of the Gods. Chap. vi contains an interesting discussion of data relating to magic rites the purpose of which was to secure the fertility of the earth; and the final chapter in a few pages deals with the influence of the pagan belief on Christianity.

In such studies as this, which must depend in large measure on the combination of data often widely separate in source—data whose meaning must frequently be divined—there is serious danger that the investigator may in spite of himself be betrayed into flights of fancy and led to form baseless hypotheses. Dieterich, however, has successfully resisted all such temptations; he everywhere proceeds from carefully observed facts, and uses with caution analogies drawn from varied peoples, with the result that his investigation is both stimulating and fruitful.

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